At the Smithville Methodist Church

Stephen Dunn

It was supposed to be Arts & Crafts for a week, but when she came home with the "Jesus Saves" button, we knew what art was up, what ancient craft.

She liked her little friends. She liked the songs they sang when they weren't twisting and folding paper into dolls. What could be so bad?

Jesus had been a good man, and putting faith in good men was what we had to do to stay this side of cynicism, that other sadness.

OK, we said, One week. But when she came home singing "Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so," it was time to talk. Could we say Jesus doesn't love you? Could I tell her the Bible is a great book certain people use to make you feel bad? We sent her back without a word.

It had been so long since we believed, so long since we needed Jesus as our nemesis and friend, that we thought he was sufficiently dead,

that our children would think of him like Lincoln or Thomas Jefferson. Soon it became clear to us: you can't teach disbelief to a child,

only wonderful stories, and we hadn't a story nearly as good. On parents' night there were the Arts & Crafts all spread out like appetizers. Then we took our seats in the church
and the children sang a song about the Ark, and Hallelujah

and one in which they had to jump up and down for Jesus. I can't remember ever feeling so uncertain about what's comic, what's serious.

Evolution is magical but devoid of heroes. You can't say to your child "Evolution loves you." The story stinks of extinction and nothing exciting happens for centuries. I didn't have a wonderful story for my child and she was beaming. All the way home in the car she sang the songs, occasionally standing up for Jesus. There was nothing to do but drive, ride it out, sing along in silence.